

HOUSE CAREAX

Passage into Horror



PREMIERE ISSUE

**An Evening with
Clive Barker**

**Movie and Book
Reviews**

**Small Press
Horrors**

**Mysterious Blue
Flames**

New Fiction

**A Talk with
Rex Miller,
author of SLOB**

**Plus
Much
More . . .**

SPRING 1988

No. 1

\$2.95

Introduction
by Thom Carnell

1

Quick Chills
by Peter Enfantino

2

An Evening With Clive Barker
by Joan Schramm

5

The Armchair Critic
by Joe Lopez

11

Hellraiser
review by Jack Boren

12

Comic Books
by Bruce Runningvomit

13

Where Darkness Lives
poem by Franceska Gleason

14

Mystery of the Blue Flames
by Amy Jackson

15

Jhustin Time for Christmas
fiction by Thom Carnell

16

Small Press Box
by Peter Enfantino

19

Song of Kall
review by Clifford Brooks

22

Review Board

23

Perfume
review by Clifford Brooks

25

Miracle Carpet Cleaner
fiction by Janadale Sylvé-Wickersham

27

A Talk with Rex Miller

35

The Story Behind Our Cover
by Janadale Sylvé-Wickersham

38

EditorsJoan Schramm
Janadale Sylvé-Wickersham**Writers**Jack Boren
Clifford Brooks
Thom Carnell
Peter Enfantino
Franceska Gleason
Amy Jackson
Joe Lopez
Joan Schramm
Bruce Runningvomit
Janadale Sylvé-Wickersham**Artist**

Kevin Routon

LayoutClifford Brooks
Peter Enfantino
Joe Lopez
Joan Schramm
Bruce Runningvomit**Cover**

Kevin Routon

*The staff would like to thank
the following individuals
without whose assistance and
understanding this publication
would not have been possible.*

*Clive Barker
Dark Carnival
Margaret Enfantino
Natalia Enfantino
Rex Miller
Ruth Myers
Ben Schramm
Stefie Schramm
Weinberg Books
Jim Wickersham*

HOUSE CARFAX Magazine is published four times annually by House Carfax Publications, 145 Tully Road, San Jose, CA 95111. Entire contents copyright 1988. After publication, rights revert to individual creator. Nothing can be reproduced without permission of its creator. Single copy price: \$2.95. Subscription: 4 issues a year for \$10. Price subject to change without notice. No responsibility taken for unsolicited materials. Writer's guidelines available. Send SASE.

A GATHERING OF F(R)IENDS

*By a route obscure and lonely,
 Haunted by ill angels only,
 Where an Eidolon, named Night,
 On a black throne reigns upright,
 I have reached these lands but newly
 From an ultimate dim Thule-
 From a weird clime that lieth, sublime,
 Out of space-out to Time.*

--Edgar Allan Poe

It is night. There is a chill in the air. A veil of mist covers the moist ground as you walk among the trees and tombstones. You pass a monument of a kneeling angel. Its face is raised in silent grief. The rain traces small tears down the stone as the guardian pleads its moot case. Leaving the cemetery, you come upon a grove of willow trees that seem to reach out for you like the hands of a tired child. This is the place your parents warned you about. The land beyond the graveyard. The place where no rules apply. Where old and new receive equal scrutiny. A gathering place for kindred spirits. Darker than the blackest pitch, the landscape seems strangely warm, inviting and so very familiar.

Traveling over a series of small knolls, you walk until you come upon an old abbey or rectory. As you approach, a wolf howls in the distance. You love the theatrics of it all. Over the gate, embossed in wrought iron, is the legend: HOUSE CARFAX. Pushing the large, metal gate open enough to squeeze through, its rusting hinges crying out in protest, you enter. The grass makes your stocking feet wet until a good portion of the socks flip-flap at the end of your toes. Hairs on the back of your neck rise as you feel someone or some THING watching you.

What you can see of the building is a tall, slender rectangle which is in such a state of disrepair that at first you think that no one is inside; but then you notice smoke rising from one of the chimneys. Weeds have replaced the shrubbery and you think of the splendor this garden must have once had. The plants now have no color and it looks as if all life has been drained from them by their vampiric neighbors. Gargoyles stare down in frozen menace, mute chroniclers to the ever increasing cemetery population. The doors, you notice once you reach them, are ornate wood and iron. Two brass lion head door-knockers are set in the heavy panels. Inside, there is movement. Shadows perform their shadow dance in the crack at the base of the door. Abruptly, one of the doors swings inward. A man's pale hand slides from the darkness, ruffles protruding from his cuffs, beckoning you in. As you enter, words spring unbidden to mind:

The whole place was thick with dust. The floor was seemingly inches deep, except where there were recent footsteps, in which on holding down my lamp I could see marks of hobnails where the dust was cracked. The walls were fluffy and heavy with dust, and in the corners were masses of spiders' webs whereon the dust had gathered till they looked like old tattered rags as the weight had torn them partly down. On a table in the hall was a great bunch of keys, with a time-yellowed label on each. They had been used several times, for on the table were several rents in the blanket of dust, similar to that exposed when the Professor lifted them.

--Bram Stoker's DRACULA

A pale, yet handsome man steps into the light to close the door. He is dressed in dark evening clothes. The phrase 'mourning coat' comes to mind when you look at the cut of his jacket. Long, black hair washes over his head, held in the back by an odd Oriental clasp. He brushes a speck of dust from his lapel before speaking. The voice is rich and full.

"Good evening. Enter freely and of your own will."

He leads you to a library occupied by a group of finely dressed people. They mill about the room, quietly talking and drinking. A burgundy leather chair is offered to you. On a table next to you is a wine glass half filled with a thick, dark liquid. All the other guests seem to enjoy this strange libation, although its taste is coppery to you. Your host has pulled a large, leather bound book from a bookshelf along one wall. Along the book's spine, in gold printing, are two letters--H C. He smiles warmly, walks to a chair opposite you and sits down. Opening the book, the gentleman looks to the other guests and graces them with that same toothy smile before preparing to read. The full, red lips pull back to reveal teeth somehow too long, as he begins to speak. . .

--Thom Carnell



Quick Chills

by Peter Einfantino

What I'd like to do with the couple of pages dedicated to this section in each issue is discuss horror anthologies. Some brand-new, some long out of print (OP). I mention the old-timers so that you can either seek them out in used bookstores, or avoid them when they're reprinted in lavish (overpriced) limited editions. Searching for OP books can be a lot of fun if you appreciate the challenge. Imagine looking through those old books at that half-price paperback store down on the corner, and coming across a Richard Bachman or one of the AVON FANTASY READER collections from the late '40s. It happens.

For instance, at a nearby flea market, I recently came across Davis Grubb's **TWELVE TALES OF SUSPENSE AND THE SUPERNATURAL** (Fawcett 1964); Charles Beaumont's **NIGHT RIDE AND OTHER JOURNEYS** (Bantam 1960); and a sword-and-sorcery title edited by L. Sprague DeCamp, **WARLOCKS AND WIZARDS** (Berkeley 1970). All OP and sought after by collectors. The price? Seventy-five cents for all three books! So there are bargains out there. Just be patient.

Here are a couple to look out for . . . and one you might want to steer clear of:

WEIRD TALES (Pyramid, 1964) edited by Leo Margulies, 155 pages. Contents: "The Man Who Returned", Edmond Hamilton; "Spider Mansion", Fritz Leiber, Jr.; "A Question of Etiquette", Robert Bloch; "The Sea Witch", Nictzin Dyalhis; "The Strange High House in the Mist", H.P. Lovecraft; "The Drifting Snow", August Derleth; "The Body Masters", Frank Belknap Long, Jr.; "Pigeons From Hell", Robert E. Howard.

From the Virgil Finlay cover to the classic "zuvembie" Howard story, this is one solid collection. Reprinted from choice issues of the legendary **WEIRD TALES**, it appears this was the first in what was to be a series of reprints, but sadly, only two were published (the other being **WORLDS OF WEIRD**, a volume I'll cover in a future column). The first story in the collection, "The Man Who Returned", deals with a man who returns from the grave. No slobbering zombie here, though. Just a man caught between two horrors--returning to his grave or to the family who probably wouldn't care too much for a rotting corpse ringing their doorbell. A different kind of horror, "Spider Mansion", conjures up one of those big bugs that ran rampant in the '50s cinema. And then there's the classic winter vampire tale, "The Drifting Snow", the precursor to Stephen King's "One for the Road". Seek this book out.

HORROR TIMES TEN (Berkeley 1967), 176 pages. Contents: "The Trunk Lady", Ray Bradbury; "Cool Air", H.P. Lovecraft; "The Lonesome Place", August Derleth; "The Dead Remember", Robert E. Howard; "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'", Sir Arthur Conan Doyle; "That Receding Brow", Max Brand; "His Unconquerable Enemy", W.C. Morrow; "The Dead Valley", Ralph Adams Cram; "The Gorgon's Head", Gertrude Bacon; "The Skeleton in the Closet", Robert Bloch.

In the late 1960s, Alden H. Norton edited a series of three horror paperbacks*: **HAUNTINGS AND HORRORS**, **MASTERS OF HORROR**, and the best of the three, **HORROR TIMES TEN**. Aside from the Brand story, which is long and plodding, this book contains a lot of first-class scares, the best of which is the little known Bradbury mystery-thriller, "The Trunk Lady". Little Johnny happens upon his favorite baby-sitter stuffed into a trunk in the attic. But who killed her? His mother? His father? Grandma? Whoever it is decides that Johnny should join the baby-sitter! Also recommended are the Derleth and Howard tales, both with enough chills to keep you up all night.

TWISTED TALES (Blackthorne, 1987), 243 pages. Contents: "The Waiting Game"; "Roomers"; "The Hollow"; "Pride of the Fleet"; "Jessie's Friend"; "Over His Head"; "Black Death"; "Cycle"; "Good Neighbor"; "Children of the Stars"; "The Apartment"; "Rendezvous"; "Members Only". All stories written by Bruce Jones.

The first story in **TWISTED TALES** is a psychological thriller about a man trying to find his wife while Christmas shopping. But if you've entered the mind of comic book writer Bruce Jones before, you know all is not what it seems. Jones is a master of the horror comic. From 1982-1984, he wrote most of the startling stories that made up **TWISTED TALES**, arguably the best and most graphically illustrated magazine since the early days of **CREEPY** and **EERIE**. So one comes to this book with high expectations--and in the long run is somewhat disappointed.

Granted, it's better than most of the stuff passed off as horror these days, but after reading Jones' earlier work, you get the feeling he's just cruising on these. Aside from the first unnerving Christmas tale, he telecasts his "twist" endings halfway through the remaining stories. Here's to Jones returning to comics.

*According to Everett F. Bleiler in his excellent study of horror fiction, "The Guide to Supernatural Fiction" (Kent State University Press, 1983, \$49.95), the series was actually ghost-edited by well known anthologist, Sam Moskowitz (pages 385-386).

NEW AND UPCOMING ANTHOLOGIES

THE SELECTED STORIES OF ROBERT BLOCH, (massive three-volume set with almost 100 stories; Underwood-Miller HC, \$80; signed, numbered limited edition, \$125).

TALES OF THE DARK #3, edited by Lincoln Child (classic stories by E. F. Benson, H.R. Wakefield, Ramsey Campbell, etc.; St. Martins Press, \$3.50).

RED DREAMS, Dennis Etchison (Berkeley, \$3.50).

SHADOWS 10, edited by Charles L. Grant (14 new stories from Douglas Winter, T.M. Wright and others; Doubleday HC, \$12.95).

14 VICIOUS VALENTINES, edited by Martin and Rosalind Greenberg and Charles Waugh (stories by J.N. Williamson, S.R. Tem, et al; Avon, \$3.50).

THE NEW ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES, edited by Martin Greenberg and Charles Waugh (new Sherlock Holmes story by Stephen King; C & G HC, \$18.95).

STORIES OF THE WALKING DEAD, edited by Peter Haining (British HC reprint of Target PB with short stories by August Derleth, Henry Whitehead, and others; Severn House HC, \$18.95).

THE DARK DESCENT, edited by David G. Hartwell (56 stories by Stephen King, H.P. Lovecraft, Algernon Blackwood, et al; Tor HC, \$29.95).

DEVILS AND DEMONS, edited by Marvin Kaye (Stories by H.P. Lovecraft, and Ray Russell, among others; Doubleday HC \$15.95).

SCARS, Richard Christian Matheson (Scream/Press HC, \$20).

AUDREY'S PRIVATE HAUNTS, Audrey Parente (Strange Company Trade Publication, \$5.95).

THE BONES WIZARD, Alan Ryan (Doubleday, HC \$12.95).

WHISPERS VI, edited by Stuart David Schiff (short stories by Dennis Etchison, F. Paul Wilson, Alan Ryan, among others; Doubleday HC, \$12.95).

WHY NOT YOU AND I? Karl Edward Wagner (Tor, \$3.95; Dark Harvest HC, \$18.95; signed, numbered limited edition, \$34.95).

THE YEAR'S BEST HORROR STORIES XV, edited by Karl Edward Wagner (short stories by Joe Lansdale, Jack Dann, Ramsey Campbell, and others; Daw, \$3.50).

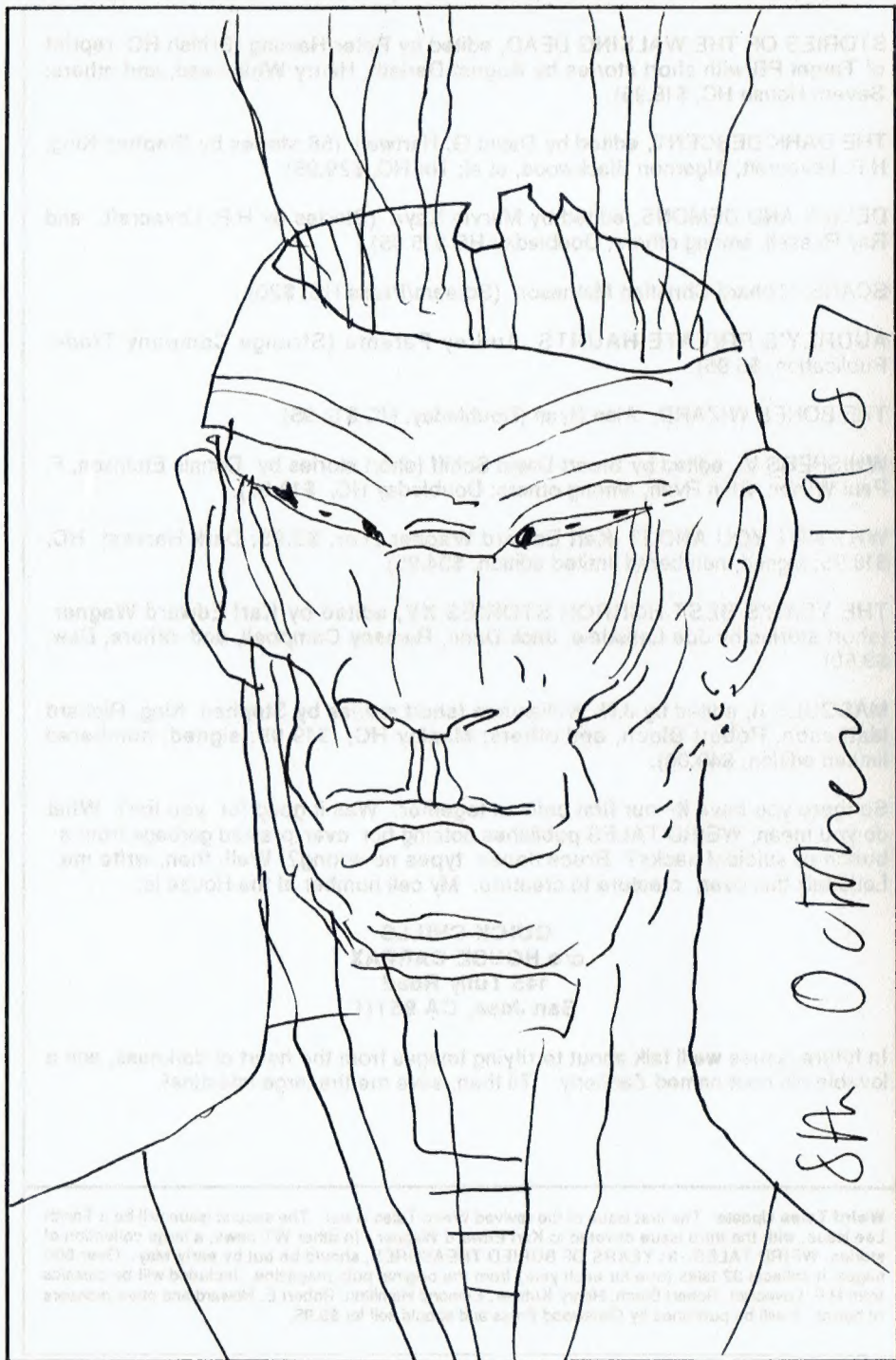
MASQUES II, edited by J.N. Williamson (short stories by Stephen King, Richard Matheson, Robert Bloch, and others; MacLay HC, \$19.95; signed, numbered limited edition, \$40.00).

So there you have it--our first column together. Was it good for you too? What do you mean, **WEIRD TALES** publishes nothing but over-praised garbage from a bunch of suicidal hacks? Bruce Jones types no wrong? Well, then, write me. Let's talk this over, creature to creature. My cell number at the House is:

QUICK CHILLS
c/o **HOUSE CARFAX**
145 Tully Road
San Jose, CA 95111

In future issues we'll talk about terrifying images from the heart of darkness, and a lovable old coot named Zacherly. 'Til then, save me the large intestine!

Weird Tales Update: The first issue of the revived *Weird Tales* is out. The second issue will be a Tanith Lee issue, with the third issue devoted to Karl Edward Wagner. In other WT news, a large collection of stories, **WEIRD TALES--31 YEARS OF BURIED TREASURES**, should be out by early May. Over 800 pages, it collects 32 tales (one for each year) from the original pulp magazine. Included will be classics from H.P. Lovecraft, Robert Bloch, Henry Kuttner, Edmond Hamilton, Robert E. Howard and other pioneers of horror. It will be published by Owlswood Press and should sell for \$9.95.



The Face of Horror

An Evening With Clive Barker

by Joan C. Schramm

Have you seen the Face of Horror lately?

It looks like a grotesque angular troll with his shriveled lips sewn up. Or it's a grizzled old man with droopy eyes, stubble on his sunken cheeks, a moustache of long tiger whiskers, hair bristles covering his body, and an X at the center of his forehead. And of course it's the face of a blank-eyed zombie with heat vapors rising from his hollowed-out skull.

But it's also the face of the popular boys' camp counselor, the one all the junior girls giggle over. It looks like that too-clean new boy in school whom the head cheerleader has targeted to meet Mom and Dad. It's the face of the young magazine salesman who knocks on your door and says he's working his way through college--and you believe him.

And it's the face of Rawhead Rex, Jacqueline Ess, the Yattering and Jack, Mamoulia, Dread, and other exquisitely horrible nightmares.

The Face of Horror is all these things, because the Face of Horror is Clive Barker. And Clive Barker is all these things, and more.

Recently, on a balmy autumn night in a Berkeley, California bookstore, I and my horror group, HOUSE CARFAX, got an exclusive interview with Clive Barker. We found a warm, engaging, generous, even playful Clive Barker.

Confession time: As an avid Barker reader, I was very familiar with his "literary" face, and had studied and discussed his style with HOUSE CARFAX ad nauseum. But I never really noticed his physical face, the one so common on jacket covers, or in newspapers. Never wanted a poster of him on my wall, because his face could never reflect the genius of his words. To paraphrase a caption under a portrait of Shakespeare, I looked not on his picture, but on his book. Consequently, I came ill-prepared to recognize him--in the flesh, so to speak.

As to this author-on-tour roadshow: He'll read from his latest book, *WEAVEWORLD*, smile patiently to his fans, autograph their books, and bye, thanks for your support.

But it didn't start--or end--that way.

We walked in late. About 70 people were already seated in the book-lined library room. A well-dressed woman stood at the podium, speaking. Because of the scattered vacant seats, HOUSE CARFAX members couldn't sit together, at least not until the mad rush for autographs. So we split up, with me ending up in front, standing next to an empty chair.

Against the wall facing the audience, seated on a small metal folding chair, was a friendly-looking kid wearing jeans and a rumpled dark shirt. He was leaning his

elbows on his knees, sipping from a Coke can, and casually looking around. As I tiptoed in and spotted the empty chair in front, I caught his eye, and asked silently,

"Okay to sit here?"

The kid, probably a chair-folder, laughed and waved his hand casually towards the empty chair. So I sat, in time to see the woman turn towards the wall, extend her arm towards my now grinning chair-folder, and introduce Clive Barker.

He ambled over to the podium, made some easy comments about life in America, and began reading from *WEAWEORLD* in a mellow even voice lightly dipped in Cockney.

But when he got to the dialog, he stopped and explained that since the characters were from another part of England, he'd have to change the accent, and began reading in a rough, loud, familiar Liverpool garble. He read like an actor, with body, hand, and head movements that drew his listeners in to the written scene. After seeing that, it was easy to believe he wrote plays.

When he was finished, he welcomed audience members to come up if they wished, for him to autograph whatever they offered. He said it without a hint of patronism, arrogance, or conceit, but with the warmth, charm and class of a right proper English gentleman.

And so began the hours of audience attention...and look at the gifts he brought, as though he, Clive Barker alone, weren't enough! The quirky and disturbing figures--reprinted here--are but a sample of what he drew in each fan's book, with personal greeting, while he joked and answered countless questions.

His outwardly handsome, wholesome appearance belies what his fans admire him for--the disturbing, unflinching horror he creates so well. Is that why these figures are so fascinating? Do they serve as glimpses into the window of his mind--that same imagination that gave birth to the quality of horror that horror fans only dreamed about? Well, dream no more, my lovelies, he seems to say. And does say, even during conversations that seem to be routine, like this quick one while he drew in a fan's book:

Fan: Are you married?

Barker: No.

Fan: Wanna meet my sister?

Barker: Is she alive?

The crowd chuckled, and understood, because they expected him to turn mundane banter into horror story dialog--because he was Clive Barker.

His works include plays, novels, art work, and the modern horror classic, *BOOKS OF BLOOD*, a series of short, compelling nightmare stories. His latest work is the fantasy novel he came to Berkeley to introduce, *WEAWEORLD*.

But it's stories like "Midnight Meat Train," "Dread," "Pig's Blood Blues," and "Rawhead Rex" that sing the body horrific, and that drew fans to the Berkeley bookstore.

HOUSE CARFAX was there, and wondered--with all this free-flowing admiration sloshing over him--what advice he had for growing writers who'd like to write horror but are so intimidated by their admiration for him they won't even try.

He answered with the ease and swiftness of a knife slicing through fat flesh.

"I'm intimidated by Ray Bradbury and Herman Melville. But it's okay to be intimidated. Just use it to inspire yourself to do something uniquely your own and call it your own."

Of course, Barker has a lot to call his own--his writing style, and a reputation unmatched in recent times. HC wondered how Barker maintains his level of excellence knowing that his reputation alone can sell his work--in other words, Clive, "How do you write when people have already called you the Future of Horror?"

"I ignore it. I block it out and just write for myself."

Barker's movie, **HELLRAISER**, also displays this uniqueness--he wrote and directed it. Does he like the final cut?

"Oh, yes. I'm very pleased with the result."

Then he dove into the answer with a vengeance.

"Your American style of censorship is very funny. When we finished a sex scene, we sent it to our distributor, New World, here in the U.S. How did they like it?

"'Oh, fabulous!' they said. 'But we can't use it. Sorry.' And why not?

"'Oh, much too strong,' they said. 'MPAA would never pass it.' So what are MPAA guidelines?

"'Two consecutive buttock thrusts are okay, Clive. Three are obscene.'"

Then with a wicked gleam in his eyes, he added,

"Actually, we had more than three . . ."

Barker finds easy humor in sex. But when he combines sex with religion, he seems to revel in the challenge, and in playing the provocateur. His story, "Rawhead Rex", comes to mind. It's an ultra-violent gorefest in which a young priest feels compelled to become the groveling servant before a pagan god.

HC asked Barker why the priest willingly allows Rawhead to humiliate him.

"Why else would someone become a priest unless they like to kneel and be pissed on?"

No one answered him.

His stories repeat the haunting theme of fear, or even death, in sex. HC asked if fear and sex weren't really two sides of the same coin. His easy smile faded.

"Definitely. Do you know what the French call that time immediately after lovemaking? *Petite mort*."

Someone said quietly,

"That means 'little death' doesn't it?"

He fixed on her gaze for a few seconds, and said, "That's right." He went on signing books for his now subdued fans. He'd made his point.

Then he cut the gloom with a chuckle.

"That's why *Age of Desire* is one of my favorite BOOKS OF BLOOD stories. It goes too far."

Some critics believe Barker "goes too far" with his horror descriptions, but his readers, and fellow writers, keep reading.

Barker has proved that he knows just how far to go for the right effect. And that goes for the funny effect as well as the fright effect:

After the reading, some HC members, writer included, had to pass another horror bookstore--Dark Carnival--to get back to the car. Dark Carnival was the first stop that night on Barker's bookstore tour.

Walking past Dark Carnival about 11:30 p.m., we noticed the lights on, though the glass door was closed. One of the organizers of Barker's tour was in the front, putting books away. We stopped, and I shouted through the locked door,

"Hey, thanks for inviting him. It worked out great! He's so helpful, and very funny, and treated us like old friends! And he was really generous with his time."

She smiled, quickly looked to the side out of our range and mouthed,

"What did he say?"

I was still on the Barker high, and so eager to talk about our memorable encounter. I didn't talk, I gushed, in spite of myself.

"Oh, he was great. He told us his favorite stories, who his heroes are, and . . . and . . ."

In the middle of our accolade, an impish, moronically grinning face leaned into view at the side of the glass door and posed there, frozen in that ghastly grin--it was Barker. Listening all the time. To the gushing. How humiliating. How hysterical.

And just as suddenly, caught up in his unexpected appearance, we roared with him at his joke. Walking away, we wondered if all horror writers were so playful,

and respectful at the same time. He didn't have to show us he was there.

But had he gotten angry during our bookstore interview? Ah, yes, but just a little.

We mentioned a recent Fangoria interview in which prolific horror writer/editor Charles Grant worried that Barker might be overextending himself in his artistic activities--plays, short stories, novels, scriptwriter and director. He's afraid Barker is spreading his talents too thin, and will burn out before his time.

HC asked Barker about Grant's remark. Barker's response was fun to watch. He spit on both palms, as though preparing for a fist fight, rubbed his hands together in mock menace, leaned forward and asked rhetorically,

"Do you know how many pseudonyms Grant has?"

Again, he made his point with a pointed question .

Noticing the late hour, and almost everyone gone, he announced brightly.

"We better go. They'll lock us in."

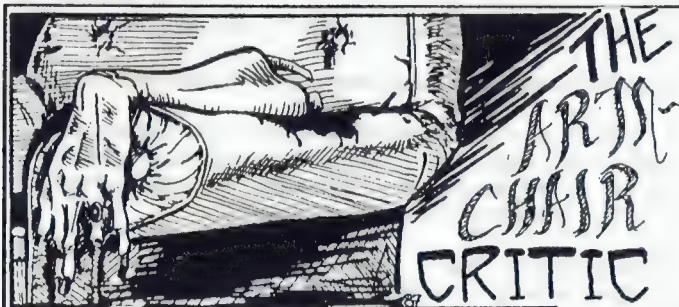
He strode towards the door with our little group following him out, until someone said hopefully,

"We could sit around and tell ghost stories."

Clive Barker stopped, turned slowly and looked at each person there.

"And what stories we could tell . . ."





I'm going to plunge head first into my first literary effort and switch gears from being an interested reader to a full-scale, self-proclaimed critic.

My column will include feedback on the latest in home videos and cinema releases, as well as my feelings on recent books and short stories.

My inaugural assignment begins with a novel that initially had trouble getting out of its own way. The book is aptly titled *FEVRE DREAM*, a 390-page novel by George R. R. Martin. I must admit, though, as soon as the *Fevre Dream*--a huge, breathtaking steamboat--got rolling, I was hooked.

Captain Abner Marsh, plagued by persistent ill luck with his steamboat company, meets a steely-eyed stranger named Joshua York. Together, with York's vast wealth and Marsh's river prowess, they form a partnership to create the *Fevre Dream*, a magnificent sidewheel steamboat.

At first, things run smoothly, but eventually Marsh's strong curiosity about his partner's day-long sleeping habits and nighttime excursions lead him to the unbelievable truth of York's frightening identity.

Joshua's real purpose for creating the *Fevre Dream* unravels as the mammoth steamship begins its trek down the Mighty Mississippi to New Orleans. There he meets his greatest challenge and the outcome will decide the future of his world and, ultimately, that of Captain Marsh's as well.

Along with satisfying my daily horror requirement, I really received a good dose of history in understanding the lifestyle of a riverman in the 1860s.

Enough said. I feel a fevered thirst coming on. If you haven't already, read this chilling novel. What are you waiting for... the sun to go down?

Final score: 8.5

Whew! Okay, I feel much better now that I've had a double dose of my "special elixir". I'll wrap things up with a review of a recently escaped Clive Barker film titled *HELLRAISER*, from New World Pictures.

What a disappointment! I've never read any of Mr. Barker's celebrated horror stories, but I hope this is not an indication of things to come. Honestly, folks, because of the bad reception this film received at a recent sneak preview, I vowed that I would not walk into the theatre with a negative attitude.

Boy, did I take a plunge on the Richter scale! The only thing that kept this film from sinking below the rating meter was the ultra-graphic violence and some damn good special effects. I can't put my finger on what exactly went wrong because the central idea was a good one. The explicit reality of what can happen to you should your curiosity venture beyond your control was very well portrayed.

An enterprising young fellow I'll call Raul, (I wasn't paying that much attention to names) gets himself into a predicament beyond his wildest imagination. He opens a virtual "Pandora's Box" and enters a world that has no limits and goes beyond any cravings his curious mind ever knew existed.

I realize this clip was made on a limited budget, but come on--the acting was so poor they should have paid me to sit back and act like I really enjoyed it.

Even if you love blood and gore, don't waste your hard earned money on this failed experiment. Wait till it comes out in video form and invite your fellow worshippers over for a quick lesson from Mr. Barker on how not to make a horror film.

Final score: 4.2

The Armchair Critic is Joe Lopez

Movie Review

HELLRAISER

by Jack Boren

A twinge of the occult, good special effects and a big dose of non-standard gore. I can't say that this one didn't make me jump a couple of times.

The story was a good extension of a particular man's desires. He tries everything but wants more. His desires are granted through a shadily obtained little box and the other worlds to which it takes him. But he doesn't get what he expects! The ordeal of getting back alive, if that is what you call it, with some deadly help, turns out to be creative.

It was good to have a few relatively normal people included--a father, daughter, and her boyfriend. They still get pulled into one grisly turn of events after another.

For those with hearty stomachs and the ability to watch even the most suspenseful scenes without peeking through your fingers, this is one that will really get you hooked! Although the story is somewhat weak, the tension and mystery of those "other dimensions" are entertaining.



by Bruce Runningvomit

In literature, many consider horror novels and short stories to be undeserving of respect. Some people barely even acknowledge the existence of horror novels and short stories. And when they do, they rarely treat horror as "serious." Horror is a gutter medium, they say, written by unimaginative hacks who never really grew out of their childhoods.

Horror aficionados bitch and moan about this injustice, but, if you were to ever tell one of them that you read comic books, chances are s/he will feel towards you as one of those "serious" literary critics does about the horror genre.

I would guess that most readers of horror rarely read horror comic books. But curiously, a lot of horror writers are at least familiar with horror comics. Stephen King has often stated that EC Comics have had a big influence on him. George R. R. Martin claims to be a comic book fan. Ramsey Campbell recently wrote the introduction to Alan Moore's "The Saga of Swamp Thing." Harlan "You're-All-Ignorant-And-Stupid" Ellison even writes comics. And it's rumored that Clive Barker is considering writing and/or illustrating for DC Comics.

If you read horror but have never read, or do not currently read any horror comic books, then you really may be missing something. I suggest that you give these a chance.

EC CLASSICS 4 (SHOCK SUSPENSTORIES) Eight seven-page stories, each with a twist ending.

Undercover	Concerns a reporter who witnesses a Ku Klux Klan murder.
Yellow	About a colonel in the army who sentences his son to death for "cowardice."
Gee, Dad . . . it's a Daisy	"She loves me, she loves me not. She loves me..." Turnabout is fair play.
Halloween	Some needy orphans who can't afford a pumpkin improvise by, uh, collaborating with their crooked caretaker.
The Guilty	A moral story about racism.
Stumped	A murderous bear trapper gets his just desserts. A character in this story receives my vote for having the best groomed--and most attractive--nose hairs.
Sugar 'N Spice N' . . .	A modern-day Hansel and Gretel story with some nice twists, including first-person narration from the witch's point of view.
Cold Cuts	Man murders wife. Then the fun begins. Personal favorite of the lot.

Where Darkness Lives

by
Franceska Gleason

Greetings, Children of the Light!
I am the vampire Armand;
Welcome to my kingdom of shadow, night;
To the darkness beneath and beyond.

In these catacombs, walk you will,
And learn the ways of the night;
For only in darkness can you prevail,
My Children, to aid your flight.

The Children of Darkness, my servants are;
to take you into the mist;
And carry you to rapturous wanderings far,
Too enticing for you to resist.

Ah, immortality . . . a powerful lot;
To challenge Hell's ominous gates;
Indulge in most sensuous, blackest of thought;
Come! come! the Land of Darkness awaits!



MYSTERY OF THE BLUE FLAMES

FACT OR FICTION?

by Amy Jackson

Mark and I shared the same interest in horror, and we both wanted to feel its true power. At first we told ghost stories about strange incidents in Duluth. Like the tale of the two women killed in a mansion near the harbor where we were staying on Mark's boat. And the story about the maniac who killed two people, dumped them into a truck and pushed it off a cliff and into Lake Superior. The man was still on the loose. But just telling stories didn't help. We wanted to feel them. That's why--on Mark's suggestion--we visited the local cemetery.

It was midnight when we paused before the huge, ominous cemetery gate. It was open. It should have been closed. It hung precariously on its hinges and swung into the gaping mouth of the road leading to the graves. The sign at the entrance warned that all visitors after four p.m. would be locked in. So why would the gate be open at midnight?

We entered. Pine trees towered above the graves on both sides of the paved road, blocking any moonlight. Mark and I stuck to the narrow lane, refusing to mingle with any sepulchers. Our stomachs were turning. As we crept along, the trees became more dense and everything grew quiet. When I stopped to catch my breath, I realized we'd ascended a small sloping hill. I turned to see how much ground we'd covered. Just then, the gate latched shut with a creak, and that was when we saw them!

Dancing blue flames, flitting over and around the tombstones! I gasped, clutching Mark's shoulder to turn him towards the gate. We both watched in fright as the flames wavered around the graves, and over the dead flowers laid upon them. I felt sick, and my heart trembled, knowing we were locked inside. We turned and began to run for another entrance, but we stopped dead at the sounds of rustling and squishing coming from the bushes ahead of us. This was true terror! Those horror stories were never so real. I ached to feel the warmth and safety of our boat. Mark was frantic, and I began to run to the gate in a frenzy, pulling him behind me. The dancing flames seemed to multiply.

I don't remember how we got out. Mark doesn't either. But I can remember the most frightful sight--the gatekeeper. His stance was tyrannical, and he glowered down at us, eyes full of hate. His face was cruel, the scar above his right brow twitched, and his aquiline nose resembled a crow's beak. He held an axe at his side. He spoke ruthlessly, warning us not to "attempt to visit the dead at night." I trembled as his lips curved in a contemptuous sneer. We apologized nervously for not heeding the warning sign on the gate. I summoned up the courage to ask him why he carried an axe. He said slowly, "I was just trimming the bushes." That's when we ran.

Although the phenomenon of blue flames over cemetery gravemarkers remains a mystery, scientific theories postulate that the decomposition of buried bodies may result in the release of certain gases and chemicals; these gaseous substances, released during organic decay, are believed to produce a chemical reaction which is evidenced as gaseous "blue flames", more easily visible during evening hours.

According to Lee Gebhart and Walter Wagner, authors of *IT'S STILL A MYSTERY*, dancing blue lights were first seen in a Wyoming cemetery in 1880; they cite a more recent eyewitness report written by W.T. Little in the New York Times of August 20, 1967. Clearly this strange phenomenon merits further research. Readers are welcome to contribute.

JHUSTIN TIME FOR CHRISTMAS

by Thom Carnell



Eight-year-old Jhustin Hall lay asleep in his bed on Christmas Eve, dreaming of the coming Christmas morning. On billowy clouds of dreamstuff, visions floated through his mind--trucks, bikes, and stuffed dinosaurs that really winked at you when you clapped your hands. His visions cleared and he found himself seated on a large chocolate throne. The citizens of Toyland were proclaiming him King of all the land. King Jhustin bowed his head serenely to the crowd and declared that all his subjects were to bring him a Christmas gift. Anyone who was too poor to bring him a gift would work in the dark popcorn mines. A stern punishment but one designed to keep Toyland's citizens productive.

CLOMP! CLOMP!!
CLOMP!!! CLOMP!!!!

Jhustin awoke with a start. His sleeping mind had awakened him to a disturbance.

CLOMP! CLOMP!!

Someone was on the roof and moving toward the chimney. He heard a low chuckle, followed by singing.

"I just got back from a lovely trip
along the Milky Way;
I stopped off at the North Pole
to spend a holiday"

Over what Jhustin guessed to be the living room, the noise stopped. He wiped the sleepsand from his eyes. It was probably Dad up there pulling that tired old

Santa Claus routine. You could even hear him trying to disguise his voice.

"I called on dear ol' Santa Claus
to see what I could see;
He took me to his workshop
and told his plans to me;
So . . .

God,

could you believe it?

He jumped out of bed and started towards the hallway and the stairs. Walking past the bathroom, he heard a scraping noise that floated up the stairwell to his ears. Then, from the living room came a thud and a cough. At the head of the stairs, Jhustin lay on his stomach and slowly scooched, head first, down the top stairs. This was an old trick he'd learned when spying on his parents' parties.

"You better watch out;
you better not cry;
you better not pout;
I'm telling you why;
Santa Claus is coming to town."

Jhustin wondered how many more years he'd have to endure Dad's theatrics. It was all so embarrassing! Every half-baked holiday he'd dress up as the Easter Bunny or a ghost or a pilgrim - and now Santa Claus!

The child peered through the bannister and saw a tall man in a soiled red suit. The outfit clearly was a Santa suit, only it was tattered and dark stains covered the chest and arms.

"He's makin' a list,
and checkin' it twice;
gonna find out whose
naughty and nice;
Santa Claus is coming to town."

Jhustin slid farther down the stairs to get a better view. The man wasn't Dad, he thought. He could see how skinny he was through the thin costume.

"He sees you when you're sleeping;
he knows when you're awake."

Suddenly, without looking, the man pointed behind him. Straight at Jhustin!

"He knows when you've been bad or good;
so be good for goodness' sake.
Oh . . ."

The small figure twisted around and scooted the rest of the way down the stairs. The Santa was now fussing with the drawstrings of a large cloth bag. Jhustin was by now very curious. Who was this Santa and, more important, what was in that bag? The boy nodded to himself when his mind coughed up the answer to the most important question. Presents . . . Jhustin's presents!

He'd just go over to old Mr. Claus and cut out the middle-men (his parents).

Dad probably put this guy up to it anyway. Hey, Rudolph is reindeer stew and, no, Virginia, there ain't no Santa Claus.

The child marched over to the figure and, reaching up for the hem of the ragged coat, heard:

"With little tin horns and little
toy drums;
Rooty toot toots and rummy tum
tums;
Santa Claus is coming to town."

He grabbed the back of the dirty red coat and tugged--once, twice, three times. At first Santa seemed not to notice. Then, slowly, the gaunt figure turned.

"With curly head dolls that
toddle and coo;
Elephant boats and kiddie
cars too;
Santa Claus is coming to town."

To the boy's horror, as it turned towards him the moonlight revealed a pale, thin man squeezed into a Santa suit several sizes too small. At his pants hem, boney ankle bones protuded, caked in mud and soot. He towered over the child and his flaming red eyes bore down, riveting slippers to floor. A wiry, white beard hung midway down its chest. Deep amidst the hair was a large red mouth with greyish green teeth and a thick purple tongue. At its temples were small silvery horns that gleamed in the moonlight.

"The boys and girls in Toyland will
have a jubilee;"

Suddenly, quick as a heartbeat, the Santa reached out and grabbed Jhustin by the front of his pajamas. The boy was lifted up and angled towards the now open cloth bag. The opening yawned before him like a dark pit. In Jhustin's eight years, he'd never seen anything so black and empty. The Santa then stuffed the small form down deep into the sack and drew the drawstrings closed with the finality of a home-bound soldier leaving camp.

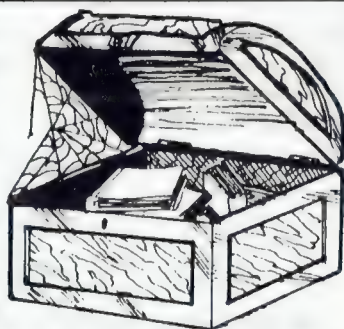
"They're going to have a dream-king
feast,
all around the Christmas tree.
So . . ."

The Santa hoisted his sack over his shoulder and walked back to the fireplace, for his trade was not in deliveries. He climbed inside the hearth and, putting a finger to his nose, rose up and out of sight. And from the roof was heard:

"You better watch out;
you better not cry;
you better not pout;
I'm telling you why;
Santa Claus is coming to town."

SMALL PRESS^{BOX}

by Peter Enfantino



Why bother with Small Press magazines?

I'll tell you why.
Ever heard of Steve Rasnic Tem?
Joe R. Lansdale?
David Schow?

If you're a casual horror buyer or stick strictly with King or Barker, chances are you haven't heard of these three men. What do they have in common, besides new novels? All write for the Small Press.

So what's the small press?

Glad you asked.

Small Press horror magazines are low-budget, high-energy (for the most part) projects labored over by some very dedicated people. Let's get one thing straight.

You don't make millions off the small press. So it can't be the money driving these people to produce. Let's take a quick look at some Small Press magazines.

Kick back in your easy chair, crack open that new issue you just got in the mail. Can you feel the ink come right off those pages? Oh sure, those first few stories were by writers who want to be Dennis Etchison when s/he grows up, but God, what a chill you got when you read that evil Santa story!

Why bother with small press?

Here are eight good reasons:

CRYPT OF CTHULHU is now celebrating its 50th issue with an all-Ramsey Campbell number. Not just any old reprints, but rare early stories. Since this is a self-titled 'Pulp Thriller and Theological Journal', fiction is not the main thrust of this magazine. CTHULHU is devoted to the study of H.P. Lovecraft. Fiction issues are customarily excellent, but some pieces of non-fiction (i.e., Echoes of Moby Dick in The Dunwich Horror) fall into the give-me-a-break-are-these-guys-obsessed-with-Lovecraft-or-what? category.

Crypt of Cthulhu

Cryptic Publications
Robert M. Price, Editor
107 E. James Street
Mount Olive, NC 28356

Standout issues include the all-Robert Bloch issue and the Ramsey Campbell/Cthulhu Mythos issue.

DAGON is of particular interest to fans of the Call of Cthulhu role-playing game, but there are interesting Mythos articles and fiction in every issue. The newest, DAGON, #18/19, is a special double T.E.D. Klein issue, complete with a chapter missing from the published edition of THE CEREMONIES. Recommended for Cthulhu fans.

ELDRITCH TALES is cream of the crop stuff, a beautifully done magazine specializing in tales in the WEIRD TALES tradition. It's amazing how much energy editor Crispin Burnham packs into each issue. Highlights include the four-part serialization of Joe R. Lansdale's masterpiece of camp, "Dead in the West", which answers that burning question you've been asking all these years: "What would Matt Dillon do if George Romero vacationed in Dodge?" This ranks at the top of the WEIRD TALES press.

GRUE. For a Small Press magazine, GRUE manages to pull in some big names. In the latest issue (#5), there's a tale which Joe Lansdale weaves around a most original horror from his excellent novel, THE NIGHTRUNNERS. There are also strong stories from Thomas F. Monteleone (NIGHT THINGS), and David Silva (editor of THE HORROR SHOW).

HAUNTS is hard to get hold of, but is definitely recommended. It tends to publish relatively unknown writers and the occasional Mythos story (Feaster in the Vault, in #5). Check out that ghoulish Victorian type in issue #5; and how can you ignore a magazine printed on yellow paper?

THE HORROR SHOW. A good feature of Dave Silva's magazine is that a lot of the tales printed within its pages clock in under a few thousand words. That means more stories for your money, and good ones at that. The book and film columns are also a definite plus. Recently, editor Silva has taken to running theme issues, such as the Dean R. Koontz issues. The newest HORROR SHOW is

Dagon

Carl Ford, Editor
11 Warwick Road
Twickenham, Middlesex
TW2 6SW

Eldritch Tales

Crispin Burnham, Editor
1051 Wellington Road
Lawrence, Kansas 66044

Grue

Hell's Kitchen Productions
P.O. Box 370
Times Square Station
New York, NY 10108

Haunts

Nightshade Publications
P.O. Box 3342
Providence, RI 02908

The Horror Show

Phantasm Press
David Silva, Editor
14848 Misty Springs Lane
Oak Run, CA 96069

devoted to "rising stars," with stories by five new horror writers and art by the incredible Allen Koszowski. Definitely the best of the "new wave" of horror magazines.

NEW BLOOD is a brand new magazine, having just published its second issue, but it gets my vote for best new face on the horizon. It's not every reader's cup of tea, but if you like your horror not spiced, but doused, with explicit sex and gore, NEW BLOOD is the magazine for you. The first digest-sized issue had some wild treats in its blood-stained pages. I still can't get Rick Garrett's "Sebastian" out of my mind. And what horror collection is complete without a tale of a good-natured young lady who just happens to have a set of fangs between her legs? Hunt this one down.

WEIRDBOOK. Since 1968, editor/publisher W. Paul Ganley has been laboring over a hot cauldron to bring us WEIRDBOOK, one of the best horror fiction magazines ever. WEIRDBOOK has published many of Brian Lumley's Mythos tales and managed to tear Gramma out of the mind of Stephen King for their 19th number. And for real eeriness, one must experience "Within the Walls of Tyre" in WEIRDBOOK's tenth anniversary issue (#13). I know that when the mailman delivers that envelope to my cell, I'm in for a good time.

New Blood

Chris Lacher, Editor
2249 South Grove Ave.
Ontario, Canada 91761

Weirdbook

W. Paul Ganley, Pub.
Box 149
Amherst Branch
Buffalo, New York 14226

Well, there you have it: eight pretty good reasons to plunk down your hard-earned dollars. Next time we'll see what horrors we can get out of THE AUSTRALIAN HORROR MAGAZINE, DEATH REALM, DOPPLEGANGER, ETCHINGS AND ODDYSEYS, FANTASY TALES, NIGHT GAUNT, 2 A.M., and WHISPERS.

Back issues of the 1130 CLUB newsletter are available through HOUSE CARFAX Archives. Some issues are in very short supply so order today to assure getting these fine publications. All issues are just \$1.50. Mail your check or money order to: HOUSE CARFAX Archives, 145 Tully Road, San Jose, CA 95111. (Make checks payable to Ralph Lopez..)



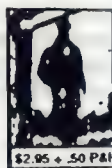
V1, N1



V



V1, N3



V1, N4, N5

Book Review

SONG OF KALI

by Dan Simmons

Tor Books, November 1986 \$3.95/311 pages

Some places are too evil to be allowed to exist. Some cities are too wicked to be suffered. Calcutta is such a place. Before Calcutta I would have laughed at such an idea. Before Calcutta I did not believe in evil--certainly not as a force separate from the actions of men. Before Calcutta I was a fool.

I had very high expectations for SONG OF KALI. Winner of the 1986 World Fantasy Convention award for best novel and recommended by a knowledgeable friend, I was prepared to be carried away by this one.

The novel begins with narrator Robert Luczak, describing the evil that is Calcutta. It's a powerful passage, as effective and memorable as Shirley Jackson's first paragraph in HILL HOUSE.

Does the novel live up to the promise of these first couple paragraphs? In part, yes, as Simmons paints a bleak picture of Calcutta, its ideologies and their consequences. It seems likely that many of Simon's observations and insights are the product of first hand experience. These are not tour book visions, but darker, more disturbing peeks at Calcutta's very soul. A Calcutta which seems to have had a profound effect on Simmons, and as a reader, you too will come away with a definite impression.

The premise of the story is simple: Robert Luczak is hired to go to Calcutta and investigate claims that legendary Indian poet, M. Das, who disappeared about a decade ago, has indeed resurfaced with a major new work. Luczak is to secure a copy of M. Das' new work (it's never clear why the document is not mailed to America for authenticating) and hopefully, be granted an interview with the mystery man.

The moment Luczak, his wife Amrita and baby Victoria reach Calcutta, the novel takes on the dark tones evidenced in the opening. Simmons has nothing positive to say about Calcutta. Calcutta is hell. There is no silver lining, no exotic flower surrounded by weeds, no warming smile on the face of a poorly fed child. The area is surrounded in mystery, dirt and corruption. It is his descriptions of decay, rot, and their acceptance, that create the real horror in this novel.

Though the goddess Kali plays a role in the unfolding of this tale, she is secondary to her worshippers, the Kapalikas, who will stop at nothing to secure a safe return to power for their leader.

Though I was never really bored with SONG OF KALI, there were few times when I couldn't put it down. It's a moody piece, almost poetic in its intensity, but in the end, Simmons leaves too many questions unanswered. The most

(Continued on page 25)

REVIEWS	FILMS	JB	CB	TC
	NOVELS			
	ANTHOLOGIES			
Angel Heart (F)				
Angel Heart/Falling Angel (N)				
Books of Blood, V1-6 (A)				***1/2
Cold Moon Over Babylon (N)			***	***
The Eyes of the Dragon (N)			***	
Fatal Attraction (F)		***1/2		
Fevre Dream (N)			***	***1/2
Hellraiser (F)		**		*1/2
The Lost Boys (F)		**1/2		**
Manhunter (F)				***1/2
Manhunter/Red Dragon (N)				****
Misery (N)			***1/2	
Night Visions 4 (A)				
Prince of Darkness (F)		***	*1/2	**1/2
The Running Man (N)			***	
The Running Man (F)			*1/2	**
Slob (N)			*	
Song of Kali (N)			**	
The Stepfather (N)			***	
The Tommyknockers (N)				
Witchboard (F)				1/2

THE REVIEWERS:

JB - Jack Boren	JL - Joe Lopez
CB - Clifford Brooks	JR - Jeff Radt
TC - Thom Carnell	BR - Bruce Runningvomitt
PE - Peter Infantino	JS - Joan Schramm
AJ - Amy Jackson	JWS - Janadale Wickersham-Sylve

PE	AJ	JL	JR	BR	JS	JSW
		* 1/2	***	** 1/2	*	
*** 1/2		** 1/2				
***	***			*****	*****	** 1/2
***				** 1/2	***	
				*** 1/2		
***		*** 1/2	* 1/2	*** 1/2	** 1/2	*** 1/2
	*****	***		** 1/2	*****	*****
**		*		***	**	
** 1/2	* 1/2	** 1/2		* 1/2	* 1/2	* 1/2
***	*****	***	* 1/2	**	*** 1/2	
*** 1/2	***	*** 1/2		***	*****	
*** 1/2				***		

				1/2	0	
***		***		***		
		**		* 1/2		
				*** 1/2		

*** 1/2		** 1/2	** 1/2	*** 1/2		
				**		
**		*		* 1/2		

STAR SYSTEM

One star--Poor
Two stars--Average
Three stars--Good
Four stars--Excellent

(SONG OF KALI--from page 22)

powerful scene, a harrowing, fatally disturbing passage which involves the Luczak's baby, is even more disturbing because it turns out to be a cheat, an unexplained plot contrivance. It's too bad, because if Simmons had seen fit to write himself out of this corner, the scene would easily classify as one of the most horrifying passages in literature. As it stands, it's more of a lost opportunity.

Unfortunately, the scene with baby Victoria is not the only time Simmons failed to shed light on his intentions. It's the nagging unresolved issues which left me less than satisfied.

PERFUME

by Patrick Suskind--English translation by John E. Woods

Pocket Books/ September 1987 \$4.50/310 pages

PERFUME, written by German author Patrick Suskind, has one of the most unusual endings I've ever read. Like the Gypsy pie in Stephen King's THINNER, the culmination seems fated, yet it's hard to believe the author would dare end the novel in this manner.

As I write this, it's been nearly 24 hours since I read the last page of PERFUME, but I'm still not sure how comfortable I am with the ending. Don't worry, I've no intention of revealing it, I just want to say that if you plan to read this one, prepare for an outlandish ending.

The jacket and opening chapter of the book set you up for a tale about a fiendish ghoul, a creature of scent as abominable as any of history's worst. Some might find the appraisal a little exaggerated, as our killer takes only one life in the first three quarters of the novel. This is a story which focuses more on the killer than on his deeds.

Grenouille is not your ordinary Jack-the-Ripper-Norman-Bates-Freddy-Krueger retread, but a bizarre human, born beneath a fish vendor's gutting table (his mother severed the umbilical cord with her butcher's knife) in 18th century Paris, certainly the smelliest French city during a period of poor waste disposal methods.

Suskind takes great pleasure in pointing out the city's odors. Through the nose of Grenouille, the killer, we are carried from scene to scene.

Grenouille begins life rather harshly and things don't get much better. His problem is that he is an odorless creature. Even after working up a sweat, he exudes no scent. As if that isn't enough, in wicked compensation, he was given a sense of smell unparalleled. So heightened are his olfactory senses that he begins to retreat into a world of odors. Odors which he casually logs and dissects, eventually combining them in his memory to try out heretofore unheard of combinations. For Grenouille, scents provide much more information, and certainly more pleasure, than words.

Used and demeaned by others, he learns to hate man, feeling apart and superior to the odious specious. In a brilliant piece of story telling, Suskind explains that

people are uncomfortable by Grenouille because they sense his difference. He reminds us that odors are an important part of our everyday life and that even though we don't always notice human scents on a conscious level, they do affect us subconsciously.

In an attempt to manipulate others and to be accepted, Grenouille concocts the first in a series of personal scents for himself. A scent that will enable him to walk through the world of man unnoticed, no longer creating unease in others because of his perceived difference.

Grenouille's obsession with scents, his lack of a human odor and his raging passion to obtain the most wonderful odor on earth, are the thrust of this story.

Reviews by Clifford V. Brooks

\$10 A YEAR RENT?

YES!

Get in on the ground floor of HOUSE CARFAX Magazine!
Enjoy private residency at our New House with 4 issues a year for only \$10.

Regular single issue price: \$2.95. By subscribing, you save \$1.80 off the regular, single copy price. (Make checks payable to Ralph Lopez)

Mail Check or Money order to:

House Carfax
145 Tully Road
San Jose, CA 95111

☐ This is a renewal

Please send me the next 4 issues of HOUSE CARFAX Magazine. I've enclosed a check or money order for \$10.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ **STATE** _____

ZIP CODE _____

For foreign orders, please add .50 per issue.

MIRACLE CARPET CLEANER

Fiction by Janadale Sylvé-Wickersham

"Carpet needs cleaning, Harold." Myrtle's red face was puffy. And her asthma was acting up, squeezing tired wheezes from her big, deep-v'd bosom.

Harold grunted--or burped. It was hard to say which.

"I'll call somebody myself, if you don't get up off your lard butt and do it! And it won't be cheap, neither!"

"Can't you ask when the game ain't on?" The mention of money perforated Harold's preoccupation with the television. A commercial about an RV camper sale came on and Harold dug his body from the sunken depths of his armchair to get another beer. His wife watched him waddle back from the refrigerator, slurping up the bubbly overrun of foam. She wished she'd shaken up the damn beer cans. Be good for one of 'em to pop open and squirt him in the eye.

"When you want it done?" Harold ignored her glare as he sidled past her and fell back into the chair, his folds of fat creaking it.

Plenty of insulation he had on him, Myrtle always said. Never had to worry about drowning or getting cold. "I told you when. A dozen times already." Myrtle wiped stray wisps of orange hair from her forehead. She meant to dye the hair red. (She'd been a true red long ago.) But it had come out orange. Orange and frizzy, not red and "full of vibrant body" as the ad had promised. Couldn't believe advertisements these days.

Harold chugged more beer, the jowls of his throat quivering as he gulped.

"Saturday," Myrtle said haughtily. "And it better be this Saturday."

"I said I would!" Harold pouted grudgingly, knowing he had said no such thing. He swore, but only under his breath.

Myrtle left.

A dog food commercial'd just finished when the doorbell rang. Harold let it ring again. And again. The ringer wouldn't go away.

"Myrrrtle!" The game would be on any second. He hollered again hoarsely. No answer and no Myrtle. Another rinng-ling!

Harold huffed impatiently through his nose and heaved his weight forward to work himself out of the chair. Darn if it wasn't when the game was on and darn if it wasn't after he'd gone and got comf'tabl'! He finally squeezed the last of his pinched waist from the tight clutches of the chair and put-putted to the door.

A short skinny guy with thick dark-framed glasses stood there offering a pale hand. "Hi," he said shyly.

"I don't want nothin'," Harold grunted. "Go 'way. I ain't buyin' nothin'." He made to close the door.

"Oh, wait!" The young man rocked forward on his toes. "You needed carpet cleaner, I believe."

Harold stared. "Yah. How'd you know?" Suspicion creased his meaty brow. He opened the door and gruffed threateningly, "You been eavesdroppin', kid, huh? That it? That how you weirdos get your kicks?"

The pale guy stepped back hastily. His lashes, thick already, were magnified against his heavy lenses. "Oh! Oh, no!" he stammered. "I'm only here to give you an introductory offer to whatever household cleaning aids you need today." His head moved from side to side as he delivered his spiel.

Kinda like that blind black musician when he sings, Harold thought, forgetting the musician's name. "And what's it gonna cost me!" he asked, not about to admit he was impressed with the guy's ESP.

"Oh! Oh--it won't cost you anything." The salesman hastened to explain.

"This is an introductory offer, you see. That means we give it to you free."

"Absolutely free, huh?"

"Oh, yes! Surely!"

Harold opened the door wider. "No kiddin'?"

"Oh, no! No. Absolutely not. The one thing we don't do is joke!" The young man hah-haaned through his nose, then blushed at his own awkward laugh. He cleared his throat and abruptly stopped smiling. "Uh, our carpet cleaner--it's organic, you see."

"Organic?" Harold squinted. "What's that? Didn't that mean it won't hurt rivers and fish and stuff?"

"Uh, well--in most cases that would be true, but--."

"Well, if it ain't gonna do nothin' to water, how the hell can ya expect it to clean out my dirt!" Harold's stomach jounced indignantly.

"I said in most cases, Mr. Lucey." The salesman grinned slyly, "Ah, you see, in this case, the word 'organic' is used slightly differently. It means that the cleaning compound itself is actually made up of living organisms." (The salesman gave that a moment to sink in.) "It not only devours dirt, oils, and stains--," he leaned forward conspiratorially. "It will even destroy fleas, ticks, bugs, and other unwanted pests. You see," he smiled magnanimously, marveling at some secret wonder, "it feeds on live pests, Mr. Lucey. Feeds on them."

Harold pushed his tongue against the inside of his cheek thoughtfully, not thinking to wonder how the salesman knew his name. "It eats up unwanted pests, huh?"

The salesman nodded solemnly, his dark eyes wide. "De-vours them!"

A thoughtful silence passed between them as Harold's brain slowly digested the import of the young man's words. If what he said was true . . .

"Just what all kinds of pests would dat be includin'?"

"Well, ah--ahem." The salesman feigned delicacy. "All kinds, basically, that is--I mean, all living pests."

"You mean . . . not just fleas and ticks, maybe . . . maybe rats, too?"

The salesman's lashes blinked furiously. "Rats, yes. Oh, yes."

"What about somethin' . . . bigger?" Harold craned his heavy neck.

"You mean--." The salesman's pale hands sought each other and then went into hiding in his trouser pockets.

"I mean like a pesky neighbor's cat--or dog," Harold interrupted, then sparing all grace, "Let's stop beatin' around the bush here. What's this stuff do to people?"

The salesman smiled, pleased to accommodate. "Well, ah--we have had a bit of a problem in the past, you see. One or two serious accidents. But--ah, we have new safety precautions now. We, ah, we give you special sandals to wear during and after application. You see, the, uh, the compound dries within one hour of application. It's perfectly harmless then. Perfectly safe."

"Perfectly safe. Within an hour, huh?"

"Perfectly. In fact--," he reached for a briefcase at his feet. "Here, why don't I, uh, do the application for you now, and--."

"No!" Harold objected quickly. Myrtle might be gone a lot longer than just an hour. "No, you just leave the stuff with me. I'll do it myself. He scratched his head and faked a congenial smile. "I promised the wife, you know. Told her I'd do it for her Saturday while she went shopping. I don't want to disappoint her. You know how it is, Mr. . . .?"

"Lux," the salesman supplied, not a bit fooled by Harold John Lucey's white lie, but minding his own business. "Yes," he nodded primly. "I do know how it is. I understand."

Harold beamed happily. "Good! Good!"

"Ah, let me leave you with the complete kit," the salesman said briskly. He opened the attache case and pulled out a clear, cylindrical container. The liquid inside it was blue, a beautiful sparkling blue that kept moving and shining like boiling crystals. Harold reached for the bottle and shook it vigorously. It was heavy and the container suddenly heated in his hand.

"Ah! Ah!" Lux chided anxiously. "You--please--you don't want to agitate that, Mr. Lucey. They become quite roused when agitated."

"So I see!" Harold felt a chill after that sudden warmth in his palm. He'd have to be careful. He stroked the carton cautiously while Lux hunted through the briefcase. He could see the glowing blue organisms swarming with liquid movement, their amoeba-like motions fluid.

"It's an extremely concentrated product," Lux mumbled, still riffling the contents of the briefcase.

Harold turned the container carefully in his hands. On one side of the carton he found a sticker that served as a label. It was an unusual label, to say the least. In 3-D color, a carpeted floor was framed, the legs and feet of furniture just barely visible above the focus of the thick, lush carpet. Harold could almost reach in and touch the clean-scented pile.

Tilt the container slightly and the 3-D sticker flashed into a picture of Lux's smiling face, his eyes big and mysterious, his shy-sly grin concealing secrets. Quite an unusual label.

No printing on the carton, no words or letters advertising a brand name. Just Lux's face miraculously transformed into a clean, brilliant carpet at the change of a shade of light.

"Ah! Yes! Here we are." Lux stood up, smiling. In his hands sat a shoebox. In the box, under white tissue, were a pair of tan, closed-toe sandals. "The special sandals you'll need, Mr. Lucey."

"You sure these're safe?" It was late to be wary.

"Oh, yes." Lux smiled reassuringly. A charming, friendly smile. "As I said, although the organisms will destroy dirt and grime, they generally do not attack inanimate objects or materials, such as the carpet, obviously. So your own shoes would be reasonably safe. However, we have had some inexplicable and rather unfortunate incidents where items of clothing worn by the victims were actually consumed. Something about, ah, body oils and sweat--body chemistry." Lux paused. "So, ah, while you might leave your shoes on the carpet and find them perfectly undamaged, you might not necessarily trust them to remain unharmed if they were on your own feet during the application. But," he added emphatically, "you'll be perfectly safe with these."

Harold grunted a semblance of thanks.

"And how many pairs of sandals will you be needing?" Lux knew the answer but asked anyway, smug with mock innocence. Still minding his own business.

A mottled flush spread in a wide, conspicuous wave up Harold's neck. Sly son-of-a-bucket, he thought, wishing he had the guts to cuss aloud. Never could. Not with Myrtle around.

Then he remembered his plan and the flush subsided as he said shamelessly, "Just one."

There was a flicker of something--gloating, perhaps?--in Lux's unreadable eyes. He handed Harold the sandals and bent to snap his briefcase shut.

"Well," Lux clasped his hands together gracefully, "I would say that concludes our business for today."

"Yeah, I guess so." Harold hurried his words, eager to hide his wares before Myrtle returned.

"Ah, may I impose again sometime should the need for further home care products arise?" Lux poised.

"Sure! Why not!" Harold's mood was suddenly generous. "House, car, garden--never know when I might need somethin'!"

"Ah, I always know," Lux corrected smoothly. "Nice doing business with you, Mr. Lucey." He turned away before Harold could say goodbye.

Harold closed the front door, cradling the products lovingly in the generous crook of his left elbow. He licked his lips shiny wet, practically panting with happiness.

He wondered how much of the game he'd missed as he went to store his goodies. Well, he thought, with unusual good sportsmanship, after this Saturday his games would never be interrupted again. Never that whining nag to mow the lawn, clean the carpets, take out the garbage, fix the faucets--and on, and on, and on. No Myrtle, no hassle, no interruptions. Ever.

Harold was nicer to Myrtle the rest of that week than he'd ever been in the 32 years they'd been married. Myrtle thought he was trying to get out of the carpet cleaning that weekend. But when he cheerily rolled out of bed at eight a.m. on Saturday to announce he wanted to get an early start on his chores, she was delighted! By the time she was pinning up her miserable orange hair for a shower (she hated getting the hair wet--it frizzed even worse with hot steam), Harold had already hurried through breakfast. And he was almost done moving the living room furniture out of the living area when Myrtle came out, dressed and combed, to see what was going on.

"Need some help?" she offered, pleased and impressed with Harold's new vigor.

Harold looked up, face already dripping sweat, smelly t-shirt soaked with bands of wet where his pores had relieved themselves. "No, no, no!" he answered hastily. "I'll take care of this myself. You go out and enjoy the morning. Pick some flowers or something."

"Well!" Myrtle drawled. "If you're going to clean my carpets, sir, the least I can do is stay out of your way!"

Harold forced himself to smile.

"Get to work!" Myrtle chuckled. "I'll go out and start on the car."

"Hey--uh--you're not going anywhere, are you?"

She shook her head. "No, why?"

"Well, I'd like you to kinda have a look at it soon's I'm done. You know--tell me if I missed any spots or anything. While it's wet, that is."

"Don't worry," Myrtle waved away his concern, beaming with new respect for his conscientiousness. "I'll come in and check as soon as you're done!"

"Good!" Harold smiled, relieved. The smile widened into a grin as she went out. With any luck, he'd be enjoying the 2:00 game this afternoon--with no trouble--and celebrating with a case of beer and an eight-topping pizza all to himself tonight.

Myrtle heard him yelling for her half an hour later. She had just finished the vinyl interior of the car and was getting ready to polish the dash. She debated taking off her gloves and decided it would only take a minute, might as well leave them on.

Harold stood proudly in the foyer, waving her with grand elegance to the carpeted step-down area. She didn't notice his funny sandals.

The carpet was still covered with a light, damp foam. "Whaddaya think?" Harold beamed.

"Good job!" Myrtle nodded approvingly, marveling at her husband's speed and efficiency.

"Well?" Harold waited, feeling tension begin within him. "Aren't you goin' to inspect it?" He cursed himself for not having it all planned out. Maybe he should have waited until the foaming subsided. But without directions on the container, it was hard to know how the compound would react--or when.

"It's still wet," Myrtle frowned.

Doggone you--just step on it! Harold fumed silently, stopping himself from clenching his teeth. He forced his voice to be friendly, cajoling. "I--I know," he explained jovially. "That's why I want you to look it over now. Before the application dries."

Myrtle shrugged. "Well--."

"Oh, don't forget to take off your thongs." He wasn't taking any chances on her shoes being safe. It'd be just his luck.

"I guess--." Myrtle stopped short as her bare feet touched the wet pile. "What's that noise?" There was a hiss, like piles of live crabs salivating slimy bubbles.

Damn it! Harold cursed again. She'd see her own feet disintegrating in plenty of time to hop back onto the tile, if this kept up. Why didn't he think to ask Lux how fast or how slow this stuff worked before he used it! Harold began to perspire anew.

"I--uh--I think it's over by the fireplace," he stammered. "Whyn't you go check while I, uh, I'll get a dry sponge."

"What do you need a dry sponge for?" Myrtle asked, growing cross at Harold's unexplainable behavior and, at the same time, taking doomful steps away from safety.

"Hey!" she cried, noticing the noise grew louder under her own soles.

Harold crouched in the kitchen, his heart drumming loudly even through so many layers of fat.

"Hey, Harold!" There was alarm in Myrtle's voice. "Harold! something funny's going on--." She suddenly realized what the 'something funny' was. Her feet tickled. And when she tried to move them, a funny suction held them grounded.

"Harold!" She shouted worriedly. "Harold, get out here! Quick! There's something wrong with the carpet!"

Harold leaned his head against the pantry cupboard, his breathing labored. Why'd it have to take so darned long?

"Harrrold!" Myrtle screamed then. She saw blood seeping into the foam before she actually felt pain. It spread about her feet in a thin red pool, turning a shade lighter when it mixed with the foam.

The panicking suffocation of being trapped teased her mind and air was suddenly hard to come by. Wheezing frightenedly, she tried again to pull her feet loose. She only aided her own destruction as the organisms finally broke through the outer layers of skin tissue and the first bolts of pain bit savagely into the real meat of her flesh. The organisms gobbled at her like hungry bacteria.

Myrtle could hardly breathe, let alone scream. She stared frozen, shocked, at the sight of her feet melting into blood and exposed tissue. Her immobilized mind went click! and began to suddenly and rapidly process obvious, vital, instantaneous facts that would be of no use to her at all. She was being devoured.

Alive. By something in the carpet. Harold was in the kitchen. Listening. Waiting for it to finish.

They were speeding up. The things. She could feel them, feel the pain, and yet felt numb all over. Faint.

Her feet disappeared, along with her mind's moment of utter clarity. She began to heave and honk for air, sounding comically like a British police car siren.

She flailed, off balance on the bloody stubs that were her ankles now, her eyes growing round, her mouth a howling tunnel, her chest tight. She rocked, teetering and grabbing at the fireplace mantel, missing, desperately panicked. As she crashed in a muted fall to the waiting foam, a long, tearing scream curdled in her asthma-stricken chest. She fell on her back and thrashed about clumsily in the few seconds before the consumption of her supine body began. She screamed again, a wild, bloody shrill against such treachery. "HARRROLD!"

Her cry was deafening in its desperation. It was the most frenzied and pained scream Harold would ever hear or imagine in his life. No singer, shouter, or reciter on earth could warble such an unearthly sound so interminably.

Harold squeezed his eyes shut, his back pressed against the cupboard as though he were a caged man held fast in iron shackles. Goosebumps thickened his skin. How long would she keep screaming? How could she suffer like that and still keep--. The door! She'd left the front door open! The neighbors would hear!

Fear and panic rushed upwards from Harold's feet and he shuddered, refusing to picture what Myrtle's feet might look like now. Groping as though he were blind, his gaze steadfastly ahead, Harold made his way to the foyer. He crossed to the door in what felt like delayed time, a slow-motion relay of some stunning game-deciding field play. He watched the door shut s-l-o-w-l-y, eternally, the sound of its closing muted, yet echoing as in a dream.

He could not listen to her scream. Could not look, could not hear--must not hear--. The hissing had grown to a growl, a breathy, hungry growl, and Harold heard jerky thumps as her limbs fell apart and her organs were torn. Her scream and her British- police-car gasping strangled into a half-finished gargle. Just the little gurgle and she was done.

How fast they were, Harold thought. And how hungry they must be. He had never imagined it--Myrtle's pain, Myrtle's screaming-- would be so horrible. He swallowed nausea as the growling subsided. There were soft, smacking sounds of contentment.

It was over now. It would be all right to look. Harold slowly turned his back to the door and looked into the living room. Revolted, he choked and almost retched. Lux had warned that although the organisms had not much liking for inanimate objects, they had been known to sometimes feast on items of clothing worn by the victims. He had expected nothing to be left of Myrtle. And there almost wasn't.

Her clothes were gone, but the organisms had been picky about her cheap earrings, as well as the hair clip which had held her orange hair. And--her gloved hands remained, squirming and moving like the amputated tail of a worm. The organisms had refused to eat her gloves!

Harold stared, dazed, feeling his stomach heave as he forced the sour taste of vomit down his throat. The richly dark blood spread around the hands was slowly, certainly consumed as the slurping, smacking noises mellowed into a purr--low, throbbing . . . satiated. The hands continued to move, the fingers balling into agonized fists.

Harold felt faint watching them. Could this really be happening? He must be going nuts. Myrtle's hands, Myrtle's fingers, in those ridiculous gloves, dancing on their living room carpet! He thought of the t.v. ad for the yellow pages and

suppressed a giggle. Let your fingers do the walking! Who said you couldn't believe advertisements these days? The urge to laugh was too strong then, and Harold snickered aloud, feeling scared and sick. He must be losing his mind! Dead hands couldn't be doing this. The salesman! That salesman must be playing some kinda trick on him.

The hands flailed like fish and suddenly discovered they could crawl. They stumbled, hesitated like wary sand crabs, and then trundled in Harold's direction like crooked, stubby legs without feet.

Harold tried to control his breathing as he guarded the hands watchfully. He hated to do this but he had to--he hadn't counted on this kind of screwup at the last minute. He'd show that double-crossing wimp. He was the one who'd put him up to this in the first place.

The hand raised its fingers searchingly, feeling for the top of the parapet. It found it, trembled a little, and struggled to crawl atop the tile.

Harold was waiting for it. Still keeping a close watch on the left hand, he placed his foot directly over the fingers of the triumphant right hand and stepped down as hard as he could, smashing to the bone. The hand tried to writhe. Ripe, rich blood flowed over the tile and dripped onto the carpet. Harold thought of Myrtle's screaming and imagined that same silent terror vibrating soundlessly from the limb he stood crushing. He ground harder. The hissing started again as the organism sopped up this new refreshment eagerly. Harold shuddered at the swiftness with which the stains were erased, beginning with the outside edges, disappearing towards the center almost as soon as the warm fluid had time to soak the pile.

The left hand seemed tremulously aware of its mate's painful plight. It paused a moment, the gloved fingers rearing in the air like a frightened horse. Harold reached to disglove the right hand, a wary eye on the left. He rolled up the edges of the glove at the wrist, revealing severed nerves and choppy, stubby flesh. Bits of bone poked through like thin white arrows. Sweating heavily, his stomach in his way, Harold worked the glove past the wrist to expose the hand, repositioning his foot with extreme care to avoid slippage.

The fingers still under the heavy toes of his sandals, he ground all of his weight over the mangled member, sliding the damaged hand to the very edge of the parapet. When he ripped off the protection of the gloves, he would kick the pulpy mess to the carpet and watch it sizzle to nothingness.

Most of the hand hung exposed, dangling like bait over the parapet edge. Unfortunately, the glove fingers fit tightly. Myrtle's pinky and thumb, broken though they were, were just too plump for the rubbery material to slide off easily. Her other fingers managed to clutch at the edge of the step-up while Harold struggled to get the stubborn appendages free. Like a boy wrestling a bone from a dog, he yanked the glove free, but not before the ruined hand had a chance to grip the tiled overhang.

Harold was too frightened, too panicked, to hear himself whimper. Desperately he kicked at the useless knuckles with the hard stub of his sandal toes. The fingers clung weakly, refusing defeat, and Harold kicked again savagely, crying out as he finally knocked loose their demonic hold. He saw the glint of a cheap wedding band as the hand went flying.

He almost paused to sob his exhaustion but yelped hysterically instead. The left hand had crept over the tile unnoticed during his frantic preoccupation with the right hand. The fingers of that sneaky left hand . . . closed tightly over his ankle.

All his fat, all his protective insulation, all his warmth- retaining layers of fatty tissue--none of it stopped cold terror from freezing icily around Harold's overtaxed heart. His eye sockets stretched as the raw stench of fear flowed odorously from

his crowded pores.

The hand was . . . on him. Tight. . . and climbing! Harold sobbed, his chest hurting. He would have to touch that thing to get rid of it. Utter revulsion rippled his great body as he-- touched it--there! He'd touched it (the tears flowed) and now-- (big sobs)--he tore madly at its insane grip.

With feral desperation Harold preyed on the claw-frozen fingers, straining all the energy he had to pry them loose and hold them back. He clamped two fingers and forced them backwards until he heard the bones snap, feeling the throbbing agony of the hand vibrate through its finger nerves. He squeezed mercilessly until he had the other two free and broke those, too.

The thumb was easy then and Harold knocked the mutilated lump to the floor, lifting his foot to crush it again and again, the way grapegrowers will stomp a grape to mashed fleshy pulp.

And then quickly, urgently, tears streaming down his face to join the mucous dribbling from his flaring nostrils, he discharged the oppressor, flinging it with vehement repulsion to the center of the living room carpet where he watched it disintegrate like a bloody cinder dying of light.

He wept, coughing and smearing snot over his chin. It wasn't supposed to have been this way. It wasn't! That goddamned salesman! He swore bitterly, hating Lux, hating himself, hating really the ugliness of what was to have been a sweet, easy deal.

He stumbled away from the dreaded carpet. He stood there for a minute, letting the scaredness and shakiness tremble through him, profoundly grateful he was alive enough to feel scared and shaken.

"Gotta get outta here," he mumbled, his face still slightly twisted into a sobbing caricature. "Gotta get out!" He felt for his keys in his back pocket, his suspicious glance reluctant to leave that carpet unguarded.

He felt better once he was out the door with the scene of so much horror behind him. He wiped his face again and blew his nose with a dirty handkerchief he fished from his pocket. His fatigued heart slowed to a relieved pace.

He still felt shaken, but an exhausted calm was on its way. He took a breath, feeling very much aware of his life, of the fact that he had just been terrorized to the point of near death, but he was still breathing. He could breathe. He could think. He could . . . eat.

Eat! He could eat a pizza! And watch the game. Just as he planned. It had worked out after all. His plan had worked!

Harold breathed another relieved sigh, sniffing through his almost-dry nose. Slowly, laboriously, with the heavy tread of one solemnly grateful to be alive, he waddled to the driveway. He unlocked the car door and opened it. He smooshed into the driver's seat, grunting that Myrtle never bothered to push the seat back when she used it. He closed the door, started the ignition, and then stopped. Was something wrong with the engine? He gunned the gas pedal, revving the engine loudly. The noise persisted. Frowning, Harold cut the motor and listened closely. There was a hissing . . .

And then his eyes saw the container of blue liquid lying on the dashboard. He reached for it, knowing instantaneously what it was and that it was too late for him.

The 3-D sticker showed Lux's smiling face, hiding a smug secret, and when he tilted the carton slightly, a picture of a sparkling clean, shiny-painted car flashed into sight. Harold's face drew into a stricken, despairing, pout. Snot dribbled anew, like slimy rivers, down his hanging jaw. He began to blubber and cry, like an abandoned baby.

A Talk With Rex Miller

by Cliff Brooks

Rex Miller's first novel, SLOB, was released in November of 1987. With glowing reviews from the likes of Stephen King, Harlan Ellison and other luminaries of the field, Miller seems to be off to a strong start.

Collectors of nostalgia may be more familiar with Rex Miller's other line of work, as he has been selling memorabilia--films, radio broadcasts, toys, premiums--through the mail, full-time, since 1971.

HC: How long have you been writing?

Miller: I've only been writing professionally for two years. I've written for years and years as sort of a dilettante freelance writer.

HC: What works have you published prior to SLOB?

Miller: I sold a television screenplay and a non-fiction book (COLLECTABLES, THE ECONOMICS OF DEALING) to the Antique Trader. I've had a number of things published in magazines and so on. That was my basis for approaching Harlan Ellison with a piece I'd written about Viet Nam. He encouraged me and referred me to his agent, Richard Curtis, and I've been working with Curtis for the last two years.

HC: Was that original Viet Nam piece what led to SLOB?

Miller: That's it. Actually, I had a Viet Nam thing in mind when I was approached by Richard Curtis. He said I had a very good shot with the Viet Nam tale if I thought I could pull it off.

I wrote the book, which is called PROFANE MEN and he said, 'This is a really weird book. I think I can sell it, but your style would lend itself to horror/mystery. I promise you I could sell a horror/mystery by you.' I agreed to try a horror novel and he said, 'Let me give you a title and you write a book around it and I promise you I'll have it sold before your Viet Nam book sells.' And indeed that was the case.

HC: He gave you the title SLOB?

Miller: He gave me the title SLOB and said write a book for that. So what I did was, I wrote six! You might say I wrote a sextet.

HC: In the back of the novel, it says that SLOB is the first in the initial Eichord trilogy.

Miller: Yes, it kind of surprised me when this whole concept of this massive epic, built around a serial murder detective--became the Eichord sextet. So when he (Richard Curtis) took the first book of that-- which was in fairly polished form, he sold it immediately to NAL and they proceeded to buy the first four Eichord books, and then they bought the Viet Nam book. They bought six books in two contracts. I'm up to the fifth Eichord book and I'm right in the middle of a rewrite

on the Viet Nam book. So this year will see the release of the Viet Nam book and the second Eichord (novel), which will be out in November.

HC: What's the title of the second Eichord novel?

Miller: It's called RAMPAGE.

HC: And you've got a different serial killer for this novel?

Miller: I've got a different serial killer in all of the books with the exception of Chaingang who does come back in the fourth book.

HC: He does?

Miller: Yeah, he comes back in many more forms. The Eichord sextet is the emergence and disintegration of this character, Jack Eichord, who you'll see if you follow the books, will go up, become victorious momentarily and then he'll continue to disintegrate. Eventually, by the end of the sixth Eichord novel, he will either fall on his sword or his armor will rust--or whatever metaphor you might use. That'll be the end of Jack. However, I see no end to Chaingang. He's not dead, although, it would seem he was killed in SLOB. He comes back in the fourth book, SLICE, and he comes back in several short stories which I've sold. Some could be considered prequels.

HC: Have any of these stories seen print yet?

Miller: No, I've just begun writing them. I just wrote my very first one which will be in a book called HOT BLOOD, coming from Pocket Books in 1989. It's gonna be a dynamite book filled with top writers in the field, with the exception of me, I'm the only one I never heard of! Sensual horror is the overall theme and my short story there has nothing to do with Eichord, it's called Our Lady of the Boiler Room. It's a very short, autobiographical piece. I've also written two Chaingang vignettes based on the character of Bunkowski (Chaingang) and they'll also be in anthologies--but I can't discuss them at this time.

I have plans for a Chaingang prequel, probably called CHAINGANG, at some point down the line but I've got a lot of books I want to write before that. So I do have a lot planned for old Danny boy, he's my favorite guy.

HC: Could you list the books in the series?

Miller: Sure, if I can remember them. They'll be released every November. RAMPAGE is number two. The third one is my best book, VIPER. That's my killer, that's my real killer, that's my best book. It was a total fluke and I don't think I'll ever do that one again. That's just a miracle. I don't feel like I even wrote it--one of those kinds. If nothing ever happens to me, if nobody ever buys my books, whatever, that's the one success I've had. Just to be able to do that. I'm really grateful to Harlan and my agent and everyone who helped me get that one out, because that's going to be a real bitch. VIPER is going to be released in November of 1989. November of '90 is SLICE when you'll see Chaingang come back and really kick Eichord's butt. The fifth Eichord probably will be out in '91. I have no idea about the sixth Eichord because I haven't been contracted for it. But since they're calling it a sextet, one assumes there will be one.

I'll give you a little peek into the future: when Chaingang comes back he births his own baby. Chaingang is a midwife in probably the best scene I've written so far. He has a son who Eichord adopts so that creates entirely new possibilities for the saga in the sixth book. We might play a trick with time and Eichord's kid could be twenty.

I'm pretty convinced that Chaingang is a worthwhile character.

HC: Sounds like you've done an awful lot of work. When did you first begin all this?

Miller: Two years ago. I've written eight books in two years. I've written a non-fiction book which is in prepublication now called THE \$ECRET WORLD OF MAIL ORDER. It's all about my business and how to do it for yourself.

HC: Were you ever in Viet Nam?

Miller: No. It's like a total Stephen Crane, RED BADGE OF COURAGE sort of thing. It's simply set in Viet Nam. The working title is, PROFANE MEN, A NOVEL OF VIET NAM--which indeed it is, but it could be set anywhere. It's a novel where paranoia and confusion are subplots. It's a strange novel. It's my baby, but it's a bizarre book.

HC: It sounds as if horror found you, rather than you finding horror.

Miller: Yes. But it seems to be my natural state of mind. I have that room up there where I can open that door and all those people are in there all the time. It's not a question of expunging one's nightmares--that's where my head is. If you read my books you'll know that. You don't fake a thing like that. So I think you're right.

HC: Have any authors influenced your style?

Miller: I'm not much influenced by writers. There are writers I like enormously, that I enjoy reading. The books that I've written are books that I'd like to read. I never did believe Mickey Spillane when he said in an interview, shortly after writing I, THE JURY, that he wrote those books for money, just the same way he'd written comic books. That may be true superficially, but I always felt like Spillane's early books were written because he wanted to read the damn things. That's certainly why I wrote PROFANE MEN.

I'm not even motivated much by books. Jazz music, yes. I think I'm more influenced by musicians than I am by writers.

HC: How much time do you spend writing?

Miller: I don't really know because I have my mail order business which is just a little one-man, small-potatoes business but it's a busy business and I'm working at six or seven in the morning sometimes and still working at midnight. I don't get up that early usually, but I'm busy all day long. My books are written four or five times. I write at jackhammer speed then the cooling magma rises and I carve a book out of that.

HOUSE CARFAX, the Story Behind the Poster

So who are we anyway?

HOUSE CARFAX is a horror club. A Bay Area exclusive.

Or, so we may claim until someone steps forward to dispute that, in which case we are prepared to defend our title by simply baring fangs and finding out who--between us and the unfortunate challenger--draws the most blood.

Originated by half a dozen or so writer friends in 1986, this wonderfully strange group has grown into a marvelous mini-network of horror enthusiasts (known as Keepers of the House) whose interests range from horror reading, writing, and movies to horror art, music, and comic books.

Though selective in membership, the club welcomes the interest of true appreciators of horror. As (we believe) our poster illustrates, the House Carfax invitation is extended to serious horror fans, not mystic-minded dabblers in the occult, Satanism, fantasy, or science fiction.

The poster itself was the subject of controversy not long ago in an initial publicity campaign. Posted by one of our members on a public bulletin board at her place of employment (with, of course, permission granted to do so), the poster became the target of repeated graffiti defacements by a--what else?--misguided religionist.

Our House Carfax proponent dutifully tacked up a note next to the poster, publicly identifying herself and asking the righteous protestor to contact her to discuss objections to the message of our poster. She was convinced that this was merely a case of "wrongful interpretation," and that once the true purpose of the club were explained to this blind zealot (whose whole premise was that House Carfax sought to "instill fear and insomnia" in a "Satanic" pact of anti-holyism with the "Adversary the Devil"), an understanding would at least be reached.

Well, the "true believer" failed to come forward and communicate on decent terms, continuing to leave hellfire-and-brimstone messages on each fresh poster our House Carfax member put up. Frustrated at her opponent's cowardice, she left messages in return that openly challenged the contradiction of the "holy crusader's" religious preachings: would Jesus approve of your defacing someone else's property, or is that just one of your "Christianly" virtues?

Restating her phone number and wish to be treated fairly, she asked again to be contacted, adding that "whatever your outlandish religious beliefs, you are NOT at liberty to impinge upon other people's rights nor recreational activities," and included a warning that Security would be notified if these repeated instances of abuse to personal property continued.

Her requests went unheeded, her warning ignored. Our stealthy supporter devised a plan. With a little detective work, she managed to track down the typewriter the antagonist had used to type his notes and, scouting the surrounding work areas after hours, found evidence of the culprit's private boycott efforts.

After confirming the identity of our would-be assayer, she drafted the following poem in a fit of triumph, and, the next day, publicly posted it beneath the poster for all to see. It is reprinted here in all its "righteous glory":

To N.B., our "Christian Crusader"

(FOR, LO, HOW THE SHADOWS DO SPEAK

And the typewriter cartridges and trash cans do give up their secrets.)

'Twas not the Lord who led me to you,
Nor Jesus who revealed your game;
But would insist you cease defacing
Using AS EXCUSE his name.

For surely love, as Christ bespake it,
Wisheth fellowman but well;
Not crafty deeds of sneaky nature
Akin to the tricks of hell.

For where speaks God that each man's preference
Must abide by YOUR vain whim?
Seek not for evil in my poster:
Your fearsome devils lie within!

So, Harken, You, who points the finger.
Listen well, and heed my wit;
Heav'n hath no place for false assayers.
'TIS HELL FOR THEE, THOU HYPOCRITE!

Janadale Sylvé



house carfax

- DO YOU FIND COMFORT IN THE COMPANY OF CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT?
- DO YOU WRITE WITH THE RAVEN'S QUILL?
- DO YOU WANDER THE DARK PLACES BETWEEN THE STARS?
- DO SHADOWS BREAK TO YOU?

IF YOU ARE A HORROR WRITER
A HORROR CRITIC
OR A HORROR ENTHUSIAST

WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN US:

HOUSE CARFAX

p.o. box 12271
san jose, ca.
95198

PLEASE INCLUDE A LIST OF HORROR WRITERS, ARTISTS, AND DIRECTORS YOU FEEL ARE IMPORTANT TO THE STUDY OF HORROR. ALSO ENCLOSE YOUR PHONE NUMBER.

PLEASE: NO FANTASY
NO SCIENCE FICTION

← Next Issue →

3-D, Extra dimension or lack of depth?

An interview with Sonny Joe Fox of Sinister Cinema fame

More Reviews of books and films

Terrifying fiction

plus, a few special surprises.

